

### BOOKLESS LIBRARY

The move this school year by the Cushing Academy, a high school in Massachusetts, to [replace its 20,000 volume school library](#) with a set of e-readers and other electronic equipment has drawn a variety of comments from the school and professional community but the principal is confident he is on the right track claiming: "When I look at books, I see an outdated technology, like scrolls before books," said James Tracy, headmaster of Cushing and chief promoter of the bookless campus. "This isn't 'Fahrenheit 451' [the 1953 Ray Bradbury novel in which books are banned]. We're not discouraging students from reading. We see this as a natural way to shape emerging trends and optimize technology." Is this the way for our schools to go?

### EDUCATION PAYOFF

A [recent OECD report](#) has encouraged students to pursue as much education as possible because of the economic advantages they will then enjoy. In the words of one reviewer of the report: "Part of the reason that encouraging students to stick with K-12 education and pursue higher education, the authors say, is that despite some glimmers of an economic rebirth, unemployment is likely to remain high for some time. If recent high school graduates or college students can further their training, rather than seeking out a job that may not be there, that's a sound investment, according to the report. And OECD's data show a strong payoff from education: A male worker who obtains a college education, on average, earns \$186,000 more in gross earnings benefits over a lifetime than a worker who does not, in the nations studied."

### DATA BASES

ACARA is now developing its national data base to report on all Australian schools [Improved State data bases](#) are on President Obama's educational agenda. One commentator notes: "Data systems, which are ways of collecting and tracking information about school, student, and teacher performance, are key elements in driving the Obama administration's reform effort. Ideally, each state will set up or upgrade its data system to track student progress and measure teacher effectiveness. The systems would monitor student growth from kindergarten to college and beyond, allowing for a richer picture and analysis of student performance. These results also need to be made available to educators and policy makers to help effectively drive decisions."

### PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO STUDENTS

At the start of the 09/10 school year in the USA President Obama gave students across the nation a [back to school address](#). He urged students to pay attention to teachers, parents and other adults and "put in the hard work it takes to succeed." He challenged them: "But at the end of the day, the circumstances of your life -- what you look like, where you come from, how much money you have, what you've got going on at home -- none of that is an excuse for neglecting your homework or having a bad attitude in school. That's no excuse

for talking back to your teacher, or cutting class, or dropping out of school. There is no excuse for not trying. Where you are right now doesn't have to determine where you'll end up. No one's written your destiny for you, because here in America, you write your own destiny. You make your own future.

That's what young people like you are doing every day, all across America."

### "21ST CENTURY SKILLS: THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Andrew Rotherham and Daniel Willingham, in an [Educational Leadership article](#), suggest that what are being called 21st Century Skills are in fact not new skills but ones long taught in schools. The authors explain how skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, information literacy and global awareness have been components of human progress throughout history. In the attached article you will learn "how schools can be more deliberate about teaching these skills to all students."

### LONGER SCHOOL DAY AND YEAR

[President Obama](#) is again advocating a longer school day and year. "Now, I know longer school days and school years are not wildly popular ideas," the president said. "Not with [Malia](#) and [Sasha](#), not in my family, and probably not in yours. But the challenges of a new century demand more time in the classroom." His Education Secretary supported the idea saying: "Our school calendar is based upon the agrarian economy and not too many of our kids are working the fields today." Does our calendar need review?

### SMALL OR LARGE SCHOOLS IN THE USA?

The Bill and Melinda Gates foundation is [withdrawing money from a project](#) which promoted the development of small schools. A report indicates that "after investing a goodly share of \$2 billion into the creation of hundreds of small schools across the country, the Gates Foundation has shifted direction in its high school reform strategy, focusing less on structure and more on effective teaching and curriculum." "The structural and design changes in schools we focused on in our earlier work simply did not yield those gains," Vicki Phillips, the foundation's education director, told Congress last May.

### COURT INVOLVEMENT WITH LEAGUE TABLES


If we decide in Australia to ban league tables will we be confronted with a court decision like that in a [recent Japanese case](#)? When several months ago the New South Wales parliament passed legislation banning such tables various lawyers suggested that the courts would not uphold the legislation if it were challenged. Will there be such a challenge here?

## Catholic Secondary Principals Australia

### INTERNET ADDICTION

Students with ADHD and social phobias have been found to also be [addicted to the internet](#). Reviewing research, Amanda MacMillan writes: "Definitions vary, but an Internet addiction usually includes symptoms such as spending a lot of time on the Internet (especially more time than intended), an inability to cut back on usage, a preoccupation with online activities, and symptoms of withdrawal such as anxiety, boredom, or irritability after a few days of not going online. Researchers found that [ADHD](#) and hostility were linked to Internet addiction in children in general. In girls -- but not boys -- depression and social phobia also predicted problems." Michael Gilbert from the University of Southern California suggests families should strive to make the Internet a healthy part of their home life. "Putting the computer in a very public place, like the hallway, can integrate the Internet into normal life, rather than it becoming something you go off and do in secret," he says.

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ACARA is currently building a website on which will be published data about all schools in the nation. The site will enable viewers to compare “like” schools. Anyone with access to the data may be able to construct a table ranking schools on any or all of the items listed on the site. The possibility that league tables will be generated has given rise to much comment. Below are listed some general ideas about rating and then some pros and cons for league tables which have appeared in the media recently.

### THE RATING GAME

**Definition:** A league table is a ranking of schools on a measure of their performance. There can be as many tables as there are school performance measures. A school might rank highly on one measure but only average on another. (*J. Buckingham, Schools in the Spotlight, Centre for Independent Studies, 2003, p.12*)

It's not about simplistic league tables but it is about having public information about the performance of schools and comparing them with like schools around the country. (*Julia Gillard*)

As ever, the debate has become simplistic. On the one hand we have the desire to provide parents with more information – a good thing – and the ranking of schools based on raw data only – are bad things.

**“If it can be rated, it will be rated”.** (Rich Barton)

Customers rate hotels and restaurants on websites like TripAdvisor and Yelp. College students dive into RateMyProfessors.com before signing up for courses. Readers rate books on Amazon.com.....**but rating is about to spread like a pandemic.** Everything – everyone – will be rated by web users. You. Me. The Dentist. All the hairstylists in town. The sermons in every place of worship. Youth Soccer Coaches. Lunch meats. Wine. The fact is, on tomorrow's internet, everyone will know if you're a dog. (*Kevin Maney, The Atlantic, July/August 2009, p.38*)

**Catholic Health Care Australia** said all nursing homes should detail their performance across a range of indicators, from staff ratios and contact hours to the incidence of bed sores for a league table of their own. **“Where league tables exist in other industries, they are a vehicle of giving consumers choice”**, the organisation's chief executive Martin Laverty told *The Australian*. (*In 'Call for Aged Care League Tables', CathNews, 21/7/09, www.cathnews.com/article.aspx?aeid=15259*)

**“Baby boomers are obsessed with grades”.** “They rank everything best to worst, least to most, zero to 100, A to F”, Linton Weeks of South California Public Radio has just diagnosed in his essay, *The Grapest Generation* “they (boomers) grade movies, hotels, beef, municipal bonds and restaurants – for the quality of food, for speed of service, for cleanliness. They make up school essays and driving tests and citizenship exams. **After the release of the '79 movie “Ten”, starring boomer Bo Derek, men and women began appraising one another on a 1 to 10 scale.**” (*Ian Warden, Canberra Times, 4/7/09, p.18*)

### LEAGUE TABLES

#### PROS

**Free speech grounds.** (*Hobart Mercury, 14/9/09, p.7*)

Parents need to know not just the performance of their own school but the performance of other schools. (*Hobart Mercury, 14/9/09, p.14*)

**These transparency measures will give parents, teachers and the public much better information about how schools are going and allow governments to target additional resources to schools which may be struggling.** (*Hobart Mercury, 15/9/09, p.2*)

Making results public puts pressure on schools to raise standards, allows parents to make critically informed decisions about where to enrol their children, and, by testing essential learning, there is an increased chance that students will learn the basics. (*Education Review, September 09, p.7*)

**For the first time, teachers and communities will have access to nationally consistent information that details a school's results, its workforce, its financial resources and the student population it serves.** (*ibid*)

It is about making schools more accountable and transparent. (*Courier Mail, 21/9/09, p.15*)

**So piece by piece we set about getting those transparency measures so that not only we, the government, but the community**

can see where educational attainment is, where disadvantage is, and act to make a difference. (*ON LINE Opinion 7/9/09, p.1*)

Parents should no longer be kept in the dark about the performance of their child's school. (*Australian Educational Leader, Vol 31, No 3, 2009, p.47*)

**Parents wanted accurate information so that they could make informed decisions when choosing a school. (*ibid*)**

Mass media can play a genuine educational role by making relevant information available to the public. (*ibid*)

**Another important merit of ranking is to stimulate public discussion around critical issues. (*ibid*)**

The results of league tables can also serve to generate a national debate about long term strategic priorities and policies. (*ibid*)

**By threatening to stop members conducting national literacy and numeracy tests or to withhold results, teachers unions' and principals' associations have betrayed their real intentions: to shield their members from community scrutiny. Should they succeed, the losers will be students, the wider society and the economy. (*Australian 28/5/09, p.13*)**

Faced with the prospect of sanctions or closure, under performing schools have shown a strong propensity to improve. (*ibid*)

**OECD data has shown that public reporting of student and school results has significant positive impact on student performance, even after accounting for demographic and socio-economic backgrounds. (*ibid*)**

There is the public's right to know. Educators bemoan the possible damage to the morale of under-performing schools if they were shown up. Keeping their failures a secret would only reinforce educational disadvantage. (*ibid*)

**Dr Boston believes parents should receive clear, transparent details about national test results, teachers, students, the aims and values of the schools and the curriculum being taught. (*Australian, 12/8/09, p.13*)**

NSW Premier, Nathan Rees, endorsed the right of parents to information about their child's school, even if it causes pain to the government by highlighting those that are under performing. (*Australian, 12/8/09, p.1*)

**They (the PM and DPM) promised that when it was clear which schools were under performing they would inject 1.5 billion dollars in extra funding to lift standards by means including higher pay for good teachers prepared to work in areas of disadvantage. (*Australian, 13/5/09, p.4*)**

"We need to be able to obtain and publish rich, accurate information about our schools – real data about resources, about the background of the student population, about parental income and about literacy and numeracy results," Ms Gillard said. "It should not be a guessimate as to where disadvantage lies – it should be a matter of indisputable public record." (*ibid*)

**It always has struck me that State educational bureaucracies are more concerned with maintaining their power through control of knowledge than with assisting the students under their care. (Greg Melleuish) (*Australian, 30/7/09, p.14*)**

**The only way to expose the hidden mistakes of a bureaucratic entity is for the public to know exactly how well or poorly it is performing. So, far from exposing students to stigma and shame, the consequence of public exposure of poorly performing schools will be to shame the educational authorities into improving their performance. In this way, individual students will benefit. (*ibid*)**

"The assumption in the debate from those opposed to this information appears to be that its purpose is punitive. That rather than being used to raise the level to that of the best schools, it will be used to punish those not performing. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, quite the opposite." (Ms J Gillard)

**Certainly the core law of performance measurement, "In God we Trust, all Others Must Bring Data", universally applies – but it works best when all staff are accountable. (*Australian 17/7/09, p.13*)**

The 2006 Report on PISA looked at the characteristics of education systems in participating countries and their relationship to performance on the tests. It found that public reporting of school performance in external tests is associated with higher achievement. According to the report, students in schools that posted their reports publicly performed significantly better than students in schools that did not. The association remains positive after demographic and socio-economic background of students and schools was accounted for. (*J. Buckingham, Issue Analysis No 103, 20/11/08, p.5*)

**Students in low performing schools might be stigmatised and the school's reputation may suffer. This argument holds no water. In essence it says that students in under performing schools will be fine so long as nobody knows they are getting a poor education. It protects schools and the people responsible for them at the expense of the children and families they are meant to serve. (*ibid*)**

The truth in educational performance and comparison may hurt some teachers and governments. Failure to face and Publish hurts a lot more – its victims being the children who continue to attend schools under performing in the cone of silence. (Brendan Nelson ) *Australian 10/7/09, p.4*

**Much union criticism of so-called league tables misses the central issue: parents and tax payers have a right to know how their children and their schools are performing. The unions claim that league tables are "unfair and simplistic" and they could "stigmatise schools and lead to unfair comparisons". Any statistical data can be misused. This is not an argument against collection of the data or publication of the data. (Michael Costa) (*Australian, 10/7/09, p.12*)**

In 2004, then Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, introduced legislation that required the State to make available information about

student performance as a critical new measure of accountability. Revealing their disregard for students, powerful Teachers Unions balked at such reforms. Instead, their aim was – and remains – to protect their vested interests and influence in a system that has long covered up school failure and teacher incompetence. (Janet Albrechtsen) (*Australian*, 1/7/09, p.12)

**Right now, we do not have accurate comprehensive information to allow rigorous analysis of what schools and students are achieving. This must change. Parents have a right to information to inform their family's decision making about school enrolment. (Kevin Rudd) (*Australian*, 1/7/09 p.12)**

(Brendan Nelson) told the Australian that he was “not an advocate of government constructed league tables but if someone wants to construct a league table on the basis of publicly available information, they should be able to do so. The last time I looked, this was a free society”. (*Australian*, 1/7/09, p.12)

**The more we know about school performance the more emphasis there will be helping the ones in need. (*Australian*, 30/6/09 p.11)**

University of NSW Law Professor, George Williams, and Australian Catholic University Professor, Greg Craven, agreed the ban on school league tables, which was pushed through in NSW Parliament last week by the Coalition and the Greens, was likely to prove unconstitutional and unenforceable. “This is a truly extraordinary law in what it targets and is fundamentally misconceived”, Professor Williams said yesterday. “There are real difficulties with this, not just on a political basis, but because it could breach the Constitution. It is a clear violation of free speech rights.” (*Australian*, 30/6/09, p.2)

**The release of comparative school data would benefit: *Parents*: comparative school data would be useful for parents in choosing a school for their child or in evaluating their current school's performance. *The general public*: comparative school data would empower the public to do something about an underperforming school by putting pressure on the school to improve or pressure on the government to remedy the situation. *Policy Makers and Researchers*: comprehensive and reliable data on school performance is essential for good educational research without which educational policy suffers. *Teachers and Schools*: areas in a school requiring attention and improvement can be highlighted by making comparisons between schools, thus enabling schools to grow and improve. (Alison Rich, *Issue Analysis No 16*, 4/10/00, p.1)**

### CONS

**School and student performance statistics are strongly related to factors beyond the influence of the school, including family characteristics. (J. Buckingham, *Schools in the Spotlight, Centre for Independent Studies, Sydney, 2003, p.40*)**

Raw statistics do not take into account differences in students' abilities when they arrive at school. (*ibid*)

**School tables stigmatise schools. (*Hobart Mercury*, 14/9/09, p.7)**

League tables make life harder for teachers. (*ibid*)

**League tables are unnecessary. (*ibid*)**

League tables force schools to focus on testing results. (*ibid*)

**Naming and shaming schools in league tables is damaging to students and school communities. (*ibid*)**

Already people can access a wealth of information about schools. (*ibid*)

**League tables are the modern equivalent of the dunce's cap. (*ibid*)**

Instead of lifting up struggling schools, it pushes them down. (*ibid*)

**League tables could demoralise students and teachers and create a huge loss in confidence. (*Hobart Mercury*, 14/9/09, p.2)**

They lack transparency and important contextual information about individual schools. (*Education Review, September 09, p.7*)

**Under-achieving schools will lose students to better performing schools. (*Education Review, September 09, p.20*)**

They lead to a narrowing of the curriculum. (*ibid*)

**They lead to teaching to the test. (*ibid*)**

There is a neglect of both low and high scoring students to concentrate to those in the middle over the nearest bench mark. (*ibid*)

**There is parental anxiety about trying to get their child entry into one of the schools that does well on the tables. (*ibid*)**

There is the truly devastating effect such odious comparisons will have on their teachers' precious but fragile morale. (*ibid*)

**“Don't repeat England's mistakes.” (*Education Review, September 09, p.12*)**

Publishing test results without details of school funding would lead to unfair comparisons. (*Australian*, 16/9/09, p.9)

**Printing test results will demoralise struggling schools. (*ibid*)**

Parents (of poor performing students) may be pressured to withdraw children from National tests to artificially inflate school scores. (*Courier Mail*, 21/9/09, p.15)

**Staff may feel forced to artificially boost marks. (*ibid*)**

Any 'league table' which focuses only on the outputs or end results is incapable of actually measuring improved performance. (*ON LINE Opinion*, 7/9/09, p.1)

**League tables are not needed because systems have teams of educational administrators who have the knowledge and skills**

**to analyse and act on quality data. (ON LINE Opinion, p.2)**

Schools would be under pressure to spend valuable curriculum time to preparing students to maximise results. (*Australian Educational Leader, Vol. 31 No 3, 2009, p.47*)

**The most controversial is the comparison of test results between ‘like’ schools, particularly as no clear definition of a ‘like’ school has been determined. Given the complete failure of government efforts such as ‘Fuel Watch’ and ‘Grocery Watch’, is it any wonder that teachers are sceptical that ‘School Watch’ will be any different. (Directions in Education, 24/7/09, Vol. 18, No. 12)**

There are the two absurdities: that national testing is being undertaken before a national curriculum is in place and that our States and Territories have different school entry and leaving ages. (*ibid*)

**The inadequacy of the data also makes it hard to make accurate comment on the quality of teaching. (ibid)**

Parents are more interested in whether a school is a good fit for their child than its level of academic results, preferring to focus on aspects such as class size and the quality of care. (*ibid*)

**All the league tables show is how the school is performing in literacy and numeracy. A school shouldn’t be judged on three days of testing. You’ve got to look at the whole picture. (Australian, 12/8/09, p.4)**

Overseas evidence shows that schools direct more resources into the tested subjects of literacy and maths while untested subjects.....perceive much less time. There is also less teaching of more complex thinking and writing skills. (*Canberra Times, 24/7/09, p.13*)

**League tables turn classrooms into test preparation factories. Weeks and months are devoted to test preparation instead of deep learning. (ibid)**

League tables punish low ranking schools, their teachers and students with an annual public ‘tarring and feathering’. (*ibid*)

**League tables serve as a job guide for teachers to apply for highly ranked schools with fewer learning and behavioural problems. This means that low ranked schools often end up with the least qualified, least experienced teachers. (ibid)**

Schools will be reluctant to share successful practices with other schools if it means those schools could leapfrog them in ranking. (*ibid*)

**(League Tables Ranking Schools) Ignore the evidence that the differences within schools (between classrooms) are greater than the differences between schools, even if the comparisons were to be with ‘like’ schools. (Education Review, June 2009, p.11)**

The potential harm, socially and to individual students and families, from the publication of school results and league tables, is manifold. Overseas experience shows that it is likely to: mislead parents, policy makers and the public about school performance and quality; reduce the quality of education received by students; increase social segregation and inequity. (*Trevor Cobbold, Reporting School Results Does Greater Harm Than Good, undated, p.2*)

**Overseas experience shows that many schools resort to rorting their results by poaching high achieving students from other schools, denying entry to, or expelling low achieving students and suspending low achieving students on test days. Cheating also becomes rampant under the pressure to improve a school’s ranking. (ibid, p.3)**

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### ***A Prayer at Grading Time***

***There they sit, Father, a neat stack of exam papers, and here I sit an anxious and bewildered Solomon praying in my heart for wisdom while the controversy about grading surges on.***

***Should there be an objective standard whereby children are measured against other children?***

***And how do we weigh a child’s achievement against his ability and effort?***

***Can we penalise a child for having little natural ability when he can’t get a high mark no matter how hard he tries?***

***And what about the child for whom “A”s come easily? Will he skim through school never knowing what it is to try?***

***And what is happening when an “A” becomes so important that a child will cheat for it perhaps to avoid abuse at home?***

***So here I sit, Father, forced to take these exams seriously because other people do.***

***Long on questions, short on answers.***

***Father, as I reach reluctantly for the top paper, let me also reach for your promise:***

***“If anyone of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God.” (Author Unknown)***

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